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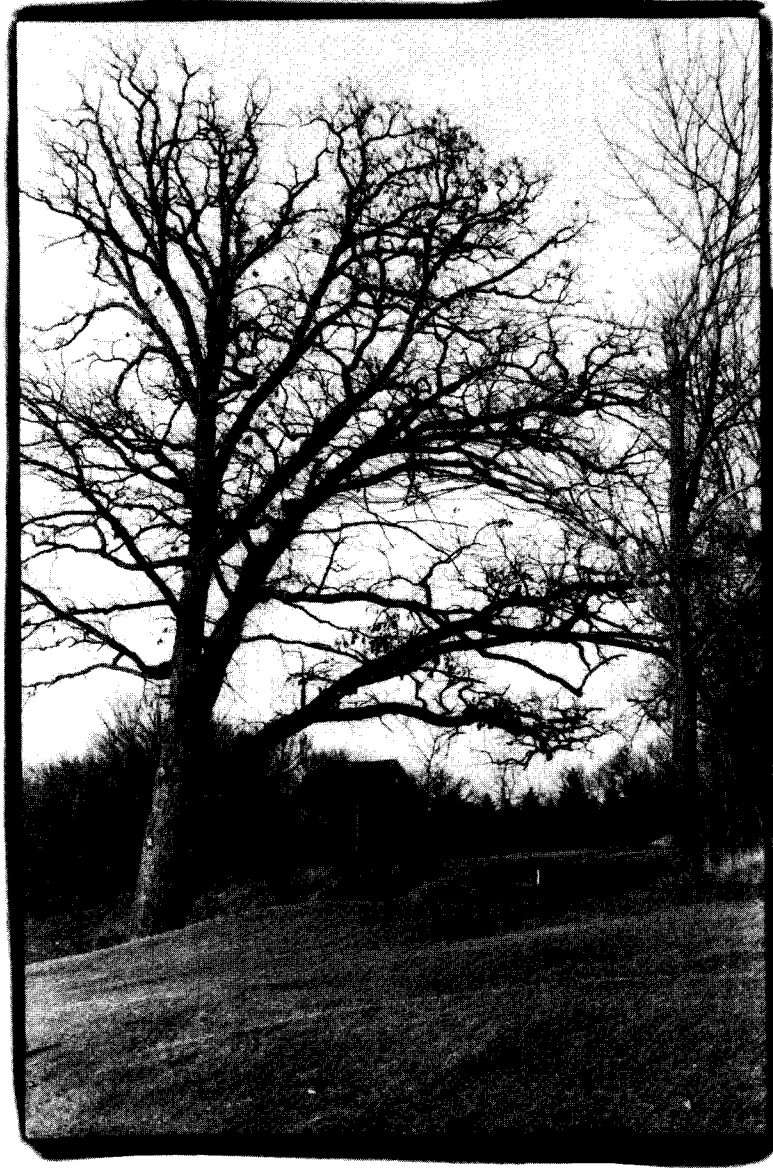


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SPECTRUM 1995

NORTHWESTERN COLLEGE



CONTENTS

| | | | |
|---|----|--|----|
| <i>A Plant Named Sigrid</i> , Danyale Temple | 2 | <i>Life's Accents</i> , Jill M. Haarsma | 16 |
| <i>Left Alone</i> , Lori Ronken | 2 | <i>All I Can Do Is Watch the Way She Stands</i> , Kelly Mowrer | 16 |
| <i>Warming</i> , Lori Ronken | 2 | <i>Backyard Percussion</i> , Kris Kling | 17 |
| <i>The Waves</i> , Matthew Floding | 2 | <i>Drops in E flat</i> , Eileen Ringnald | 17 |
| <i>Branches</i> , Crystal Sipes | 2 | <i>Spring Wine</i> , Lee Cerling | 18 |
| <i>Persistence</i> , Eileen Ringnald | 2 | <i>In Their Place</i> , Kristi Roelfs | 18 |
| <i>On Journaling</i> , Danyale Temple | 3 | <i>Resisting</i> , Diane Auman | 18 |
| <i>The Mirror</i> , Crystal Sipes | 4 | <i>Wind And Stars</i> , Jennifer Peat | 18 |
| <i>I Will</i> , Jill M. Haarsma | 4 | <i>Cradle</i> , Melissa Lovegren | 19 |
| <i>A Ride into Town</i> , Diane Auman | 4 | <i>Embrace</i> , Rebekah Dykstra | 19 |
| <i>Eyes</i> , Crystal Sipes | 4 | <i>Cherry Vanilla</i> , Amy Hanenburg | 19 |
| <i>Road Trip</i> , Donna Milkie | 5 | <i>Incident</i> , Donna Milkie | 20 |
| <i>To a Woman, Wizenad</i> , Donna Milkie | 5 | <i>Waterproof</i> , Crystal Sipes | 20 |
| <i>The Following</i> , Amy Hanenburg | 6 | <i>Jim</i> , Rebekah Dykstra | 20 |
| <i>Falls View Beach</i> , Kelly Mowrer | 6 | <i>Response to Boredom</i> , Lee Cerling | 21 |
| <i>Aureous Strands</i> , Kris Kling | 7 | <i>Selling Life</i> , Lori Ronken | 21 |
| <i>Conversation</i> , Danyale Temple | 7 | <i>The Servant</i> , Rebekah Dykstra | 21 |
| <i>Missing</i> , Kris Kling | 7 | <i>Asylum</i> , Amy Hanenburg | 22 |
| <i>Reaching for Each Other</i> , Jill M. Haarsma | 8 | <i>Dreamscape (An Awakening)</i> , Bryan Scichilone | 22 |
| <i>Angel</i> , Amy Hanenburg | 8 | <i>Déjà Vu</i> , Kris Kling | 23 |
| <i>Beyond</i> , Danyale Temple | 8 | <i>Hiding</i> , Amy Hanenburg | 23 |
| <i>Colors of an Afghan</i> , Gretchen Vander Velde | 9 | <i>Bogeyman</i> , Donna Milkie | 23 |
| <i>A Single Mother</i> , Eileen Ringnald | 9 | <i>(w)resting Oblivious</i> , Bryan Scichilone | 24 |
| <i>To a Starving Mother and Her Child</i> , Gretchen Vander Velde | 9 | <i>Break On Through</i> , Bryan Scichilone | 24 |
| <i>When the Creek Split</i> , Kris Kling | 10 | <i>Thoughts of Suicide</i> , Krista Willis | 24 |
| <i>Trapping</i> , Diane Auman | 10 | <i>Untitled</i> , Lori Ronken | 24 |
| <i>Laci</i> , Anna Minor | 10 | <i>Smoking in Bed</i> , Crystal Sipes | 25 |
| <i>All I Saw</i> , Lori Ronken | 10 | <i>First Draft</i> , Kelly Mowrer | 25 |
| <i>Pictures of Grandpa</i> , Rebekah Dykstra | 11 | <i>She said</i> , Donna Milkie | 25 |
| <i>To Josh who needs a geography lesson</i> , Lori Ronken | 12 | <i>Terminal Skywalk</i> , Kellie Gregg | 26 |
| <i>Archeology Dig</i> , Donna Milkie | 12 | <i>Once Again</i> , Crystal Sipes | 26 |
| <i>Layers</i> , Lori Ronken | 12 | <i>The Clock</i> , Kellie Gregg | 27 |
| <i>Moving</i> , Rebekah Dykstra | 13 | <i>Mercy</i> , Kelly Mowrer | 27 |
| <i>Common Ground</i> , Bryan Scichilone | 13 | <i>Treasures</i> , Kristi Roelfs | 28 |
| <i>My Sisters</i> , Danyale Temple | 14 | <i>Old Man, Seated</i> , Gretchen Vander Velde | 30 |
| <i>What They Gave Me</i> , Jill M. Haarsma | 15 | <i>Waiting with Grandma</i> , Crystal Sipes | 30 |
| <i>What i can't say to you</i> , Kellie Gregg | 15 | <i>A Retreat into Silence</i> , Carla Meinke | 31 |
| <i>Dance</i> , Amy Hanenburg | 15 | <i>Retirement</i> , Bryan Scichilone | 32 |

JUDGE'S COMMENTS

Robert Frost says that poetry "begins in delight," but "ends in wisdom, in a clarification of life." The works I have selected for awards are those that offer, as it seems to me, delight and wisdom.

"Waiting with Grandma" [by Crystal Sipes] nicely conjures the memory of playing cards with Grandma in a world now gone. [Donna Milkie's] "Bogeyman" focuses a memory of childhood fear and clarifies human endurance. "Once Again" [by Sipes] taps the universal experience of "faded memories" that bring pleasure to the searcher in the attic. [Anna Minor's] "Laci" evokes junior high school and the memory of innocence that gives way to the powerful "but" of the last line. [Danyale Temple's] "Beyond" captures a scene of misconnection in the disparate

images of cigarette smoke and tea. "Missing" [by Kris Kling] presents loneliness in a way reminiscent of Frost's "Acquainted with the Night." I liked each of these poems for the pictures, the use of memories, the making something of the past.

I put "Warming" [by Lori Ronken] in third place. That one word "piggyback" resurrects childhood and a moment of sheer joy in leaves and sun. Simple, it simply works. I chose [Diane Auman's] "Trapping" for second place, probably because I liked the last line so much. I'm not sure it is true, but it sounds right here. The images of the butterflies and baseball caps marvelously celebrate universal childhood experience, "trapped moments of good" that most of us can recall with wonder. For first place in poetry, "I Will" clarifies a moment of separation with poignancy but without sentimentality. Delight rings in the clear snapshot of the worn boots, and wis-

dom circles in the clear need to abandon the boots to the sea.

Several essays managed to find a twist of freshness, a flavor of originality. I put "My Sisters" [by Temple] in third place because of its insight into the power of subtle racism and its emphasis on the necessary unlearning that leads to significant growth. In second place, I put [Kristi Roelfs'] "Treasures." Childhood is there in the dares and the unfounded fears, but the surprise is in the union that occurs finally between the aged grandmother and the ebullient children. Finally, I chose "On Journaling" for the first place award. I believe this essay implicitly abuts the great mystery of providence. This writer has a fine eye for significant detail, a gift for storytelling, and fine insight into why a story can matter so much.

W. Dale Brown,
Professor of English, Calvin College

A Plant Named Sigrid

He sits
Alone
with his coffee,
some fish and
a plant named
Sigrid
that doesn't
talk.

It seems
Solitude
has birthed
an artist,
a philosopher,
a breadmaker...

that seems good enough

but Sigrid doesn't
talk and fish
only stare.

A number five
granite pencil,
a copy of
Simone Weil's
Gravity and Grace
and, today anyway,
oatmeal bread

will occupy him later

yet now as warm
hands clutch
the clay mug
he stares
at an M.C. Escher,
wishing
Sigrid would
say something
like

weather's been good lately.

Danyale Temple

Warming

Sitting among leaves
I let the morning sun rest
piggyback on me.

Lori Ronken, third place poetry

The Waves

The waves,
The waves come,
The waves come in.

Crashing,
Coolly caressing.

Lapping,
Liquid laughing.

Dashing,
Delightful dancing.

The waves go out,
The waves go,
The waves.

Matthew Floding

Left Alone

Brittle, spent leaves lie
tangled in the earth's hair
I refuse to comb.

Lori Ronken

Branches

The old tree stands out
Clear and strong in
My reasoning; antiquated, aged, bronzed.
Like an old photograph of itself;
It waits, and wonders at the passing time
That goes unnoticed in its limbs.
I go back to it
Time and again
In my memory.
In my memory
It is a means to an end—
A catalyst for me
In childhood memories
And youthful fantasies.
In my mind, once again,
I climb its limbs
And rest in its strong boughs.
I think long thoughts of it
And wait for the setting
When I will return.

Crystal Sipes

Persistence

Some yet red-edged leaves
hold tight to the branch they claim,
refusing the wind.

Eileen Ringnald

On Journaling



"Today it rained," reads the yellowed page of the journal. "My sister Kelli and I had a pillow fight, then we played in the mud puddles." August 14, 1982.

I am eight years old, kneeling backwards on our brown couch with my small stomach pressed against it. My eight-year-old head rests in tiny hands as the late summer rain falls onto our grass, our sidewalk, our sky blue Chevy (that never earned a space in the garage because Mom thought it was too junky) and our newly-planted flower bed. The marigolds seem brighter today—a brilliant yellow.

"Today it rained. My sister Kelli and I had a pillow fight, then we played in the mud puddles."

We are in our room. I'm laying on the bottom bunk, coloring out of a Mickey Mouse coloring book. Kelli is sitting in the tattered red bean bag, paging through a *Dynamite* magazine. She is ten years old and beautiful. Her dark hair lays comfortably on her shoulders. I see her fingers—long and slender. Already at ten—the prettiest hands I've ever seen. She suggests a pillow fight. I think about it as I finish coloring Mickey Mouse's big, round ear black.

I grab my pillow, covered in a Charlie Brown pillow case, and ready myself for the duel. Kelli throws the first blow, directly to my head.

"Today it rained. My sister Kelli and I had a pillow fight, then we played in the mud puddles."

We're outside. The sun has come. Standing barefoot on the cement stairs that lead to our front door, we decide the mud puddle in front of our neighbor's house looks like the biggest and deepest of all the mud puddles on our block. Squealing with laughter, we run across our front yard, my hand in hers. The grass is still wet. We slow ourselves as we come to the street. It is a gravel street, so we must be careful. The small bits of rock hurt our delicate feet—feet too young to be calloused yet. Kelli dips her foot into the puddle; I do the same. Before we know it, we're splashing each other and are becoming browner and

browner with each dash of muddied water. Kelli's teeth are a brilliant white against her dirty skin.

"Today it rained. My sister Kelli and I had a pillow fight, then we played in the mud puddles."

Why did I write that down? I was eight years old. How could I have known then how significant that moment would be to me now? I didn't know. I wrote it down just because—just because my eight-year-old little brain told me to. For some reason, unknown to me, I felt the need to write—even at eight.

My mother has never been a journaler. Why am I? I've tried to get her into it. I've bought her a few journals throughout the years, hoping she would feel the need to write like I do. Yet, when I happen to run across one of her journals, it remains as blank as when I first purchased it.

"Today it rained."

The first three words I ever wrote in a journal. My grandmother gave me my first journal as a late birthday present. Could she have known what she was doing when she placed that book in my hands? She was giving me back moments. She was giving me back my best friend in fifth grade. She was giving me back my first day at middle school, the night I became blood sisters with Kristen Thompsen, and the afternoon I fell from the hay loft at Jenny Gertson's Halloween party. She was giving me back a part of me.

Most of my writing continues to be moments I catch, that eventually take me back to myself. I'm not a chronicler. I never could be. I've tried, but I get bored too easily. I continue to write without any real direction.

"Face hidden by the Monday newspaper, a little old man in an orange polyester shirt taps his right foot on the library floor." July 23, 1994. South Bend Public Library.

So what? What significance does a little old man in a library have in my life? Why did I jot that down? Because I didn't want to forget. I needed to write down that moment for the same reason

I needed to write down the pillow fight shared between my sister and me when I was eight.

At eight I didn't know why I wrote what I wrote, nor at twenty do I know exactly why I write what I write. But at twenty, I'm beginning to understand why I wrote what I wrote when I was eight. Does that make any sense? As a twenty-year-old, I need to remember my sister Kelli and I playing in the mud puddles together on a late afternoon in August after a steady rain. I need to remember our small bodies, her skinny fingers, my long toes, her white teeth...the way we loved each other as children and depended on each other as sisters. I need that moment in my past to keep me living in the present. So maybe when I'm thirty I'll understand why I wrote about a little old man wearing an orange polyester shirt in a library and it will add a layer to my life that, in the present, I can only imagine.

Joan Didion writes, "We forget all too soon the things we thought we could never forget....We forget who we were." Later she writes, "I suppose that keeping in touch is what notebooks are all about." Maybe that's what I'm doing—keeping in touch with the people I used to be and seeing myself through the people I've encountered along the way.

"Today it rained. My sister Kelli and I had a pillow fight, then we played in the mud puddles." August 14, 1982.

I am eight years old.

Danyale Temple, first place prose

The Mirror

The child, in frilly blue frock and pony tail,
(Now, an old woman, feeble and frail)
Sits in the swing, and tosses pebbles
Into the crystal clear pond—
Shattering the polished surface.
She wonders about her life, daydreaming, pondering
Where it will take her, someday.
Now, the old woman, in a house robe and slippers,
(Once a young child, strong and spirited)
Sits in the rocking chair and throws old photographs
Into the trash can;
Causing not a stir,
Wondering what she did with her life.

Crystal Sipes

I Will

Your boots
stand on the step outside
right where you
always left them.

The laces are frazzled, undone
from the way you yanked
them in and out of a pattern
of holes.

The leather is creased
and colorless on the edges
bearing scars
of your use.

The soles are barely visible,
covered in the gritty dried mud
from the last trip you made
somewhere.

They rest
close to each other.

Today, I will use them.
I will walk along the beach with them.
I will walk off the old gritty dried mud.
Then I will untie the frazzled laces.
and straighten the creases.
I will leave them with the sea.

Jill M. Haarsma, first place poetry

A Ride into Town

When he woke, I crinkled myself on the end of his leg
While he bounced my body up and then down.
We are headed to town, he said.
My leg is your horse,
Let's gallop away.

We laughed at the table with our cookies and milk
Over tales stretched far from any truth.
I listened and pretended for I knew his lines.
But this was our party, our time.

I trudged after him on walks into town
Putting my feet in the place he had stepped.
He quietly handed the change to an old man
And I grasped from him one bottle of Coke.

Exhausted we sat in our chairs on the porch,
His chair faded red by the sun.
He watched carefully the cars, the kids—
Every action and sound before him was his.
He recognized each noise, each person.

Today I drive into town and visit him.
I look down on the flowers while he sees my face.
I will not cry.
We will ride into town,
Buy a bottle of pop,
And watch the world pass by.

Diane Auman

Eyes

I can see, yet, the eyes of the child in this picture,
In the face of the old woman sitting before me.
I see the same features,
only grayer, more wrinkled.
What happened to you
Between then and now?
Both times you were left wondering
Then—wondering what would be
Now—wondering what has been
First you didn't know—
Now you can't remember.
The timelessness of your youth is returning to you, its
Unseasonable timing, unfortunate.
In my mind, and in yours, you are like a child again.
And now I wonder: Why?
And, How long will it last this time?
As I look into your face, your eyes,
You look back at me
Without recognition,
Yet with a child-like smile.
Trusting, caring, dependent once again.

Crystal Sipes

Road Trip



I watched my dad from the back seat as we traveled toward Monroeville, toward Grandpa and Grandma's house. We had made this trip so many times before: nearly every summer. But this trip was made in the dark, in November. The highway was wet; the windows were up; the wipers were frantic to keep pace with the rain. There was no Maranatha cassette in the stereo, and there was no alphabet game. There had been an accident: Grandpa was dead, and Grandma was in the hospital, in a coma.

My father's face remained grimly set as he drove east, into the rain.

I wanted to stay awake for my dad, because somewhere in me I knew that he needed me, or at least that he was very sad, and maybe I could help. But the weakness of the flesh and the rhythm of the rain and the umbrella of the darkness and the murmur of the car overtook me. I fell asleep.

I awoke hours later. I don't remember how much of Ohio I saw in the sunless morning light. I do remember Monroeville at 6 a.m., her familiar landmarks veiled by the haze of a wet autumn morning.

We bridged the river where my father once ice skated and crossed the railroad tracks he once crossed on his paper route. I observed again—and for the first time—the white lettering on the town sign ("Monroeville, population 1100"),

the green door on the white Methodist church, the old green pump where we'd always stopped to fill water jugs for the ride home.

We drove around the bend in the road. Aunt Mickey and Uncle Paul's house stood on our left, and, just beyond that, Grandpa and Grandma's.

We pulled onto the gravel of my grandparents' circular driveway. Dad

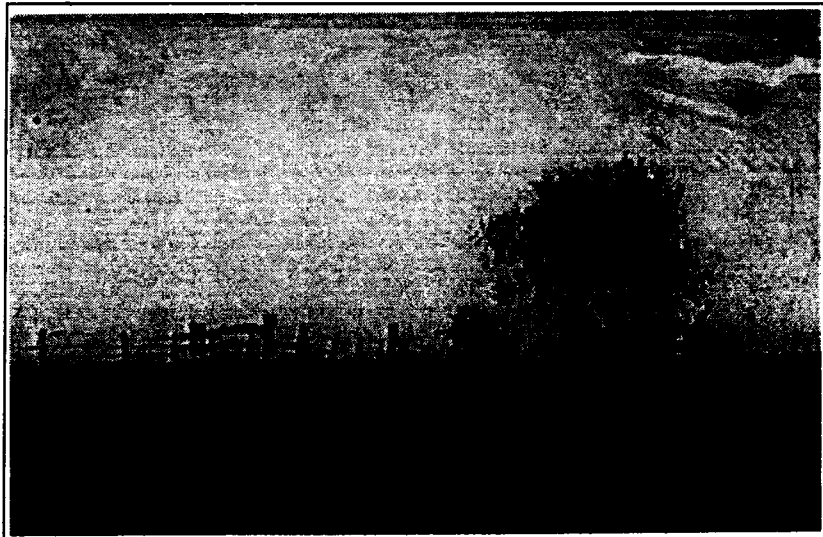
stopped the car beside the big green house and got out. The rest of us remained in the car, silent. I watched my dad weep, his shoulders hunched, his hands in his pockets. He cried there, in the morning, in the driveway of his home, in the yard of his youth. I had never seen such a thing.

Donna Milkie

To a Woman, Wizen

The alphabet of anger
has made a tablet of your face.
Now I copy the letters and lines
into my notebook,
hoping to learn the lessons for myself.

Donna Milkie



The Following

The night was still
and I was angry
you followed me
each step I took chained in distant unison with yours
stuck like a new cigarette to dry lips
you followed me
and you were still
you were
still
I was angry

I turned you spun into shadows teased by
light you were
my shadow
I wanted you
to walk next to me
to touch my hand feel your living warmth
our steps matched
in counterbalanced cadence
us

you were supposed to chase my ghosts
and I would have taught you to climb
we would have touched
walked through the fire
left each other in silence
no apology no regret
but you were my ghost
and I was your haunt

I paused to offer you my anger
begging to let you go
you faded without answer
I kept on
dragging your chains
covered with red rust worn thin
tired

you follow me
each step I take chained in distant unison with yours
you fall back
and I am less angry
you are more
still
keeping time
I do not always hear you now
feel your breath and heat in remote passing currents

soon I will reach the end of our path
turn and find you
face to face
you will be angry
and I will be
still
I will chase my ghost over the
edge into the lashing red orange fingers
rusty smoke dusting my face in farewell
you will climb though the glow
of blackened embers, small slivers
scorching then dying

you were my ghost
I was your haunt
leaving each other in silence
no apology no regret.

Amy Hanenburg

Falls View Beach

twisting
in my resisting
night's usual trance
on a mattress
familiar with embracing
more
than my tense form
i feel the echo
of your whisper as it creeps
through the screen
like your fingers
through my hair
and i
weak
fall into step
with the rhythm of the salty speech
and weave down that trail
to the water's edge
your orphaned shadow
with the sight of rocks
jutting
from the coast
silent eruptions
sharp and suspended
caught in the act
the moonlight still
fighting
the fall of the pale curtain
resisting
the clear counsel of dawn
much as i fend off conceding
the absence of your fingers
once braided into mine
staring into the sky we called ours
during a time we could get by
with possessing
nothing
more
than
ourselves

Kelly Mowrer

Aureous Strands

"You can't just be a-- "
auburn strand of hair in her eyes
"you have to be, like a bartender too."
tucks it behind a small leaf-like ear
"That's the rule"
looks up
"Right?"

and I think of
a small pond
mirror still
reflecting the sun's explosion
back to heaven,
touching everything
if but for a second
on its way up

--the crackle dry corn stalks
holding white bits of living air
smaller than gnats
flurrying at a footstep

--the thick bark of sage trunks
connected by spider thread
that stepladders to summit leaves
twisting gold-black-gold in the wind

--and the notebook in my hands
touched as well, by blinding
fragments of immaculate brilliance--
bottom limb shadows outlining the glow

now found in gentle eyes
and,
looking at her
I touch a finger to my lips
pause for a moment-
and shrug
hoping the light will shimmer
when she shakes her head.

Kris Kling

Missing

Walking alone at night
only my breath,
my whistle,
my footsteps,
clean pavement
turns into pebble covered tar
which may lead to dirt,
sand.
But I'm here under the streetlight
and I'm orange and blue
and if there was a you
for me
that's who
I'd think about.
An old man watches me while making Ramen noodles;
burns his hand.
Two identical mailboxes whisper to each other;
touch when I look away,
knowing, eventually,
I'll move on, go back,
just as eventually the sun will rise
to kiss this yawning streetlight to bed,
again and again,
until long after the pavement has cracked.

Kris Kling, honorable mention

Conversation

so

you say

i don't know i say
i don't know
you say

yeah
no
i say

whadda ya mean
you say

i don't know
i say

okay you say
okay i say

okay

Danyale Temple

Reaching for Each Other

The edge of the photo has begun to crack.
Pieces of the wood backdrop
that they stand in front of flake away
leaving the brittle photo paper
stark and yellow
against my soft hands.

I watch my grandmother.
Sixty years stand between us
and with hard knowing
she stares at me while someone
I don't know
stands with her watching
the dog, a blur at their feet.

The two
stand close.

They are young.
Both are wearing old knit
button-down sweaters that are rolling off
their shoulders, their skin
somehow exposed through their thin dresses.
And I wonder, with the stark photo in my hands,
if they are attempting to be seductive.

My eyes are drawn to their slim,
small hands—so white and pure.
Grandma's hands hang at her side, and I
notice that she wears a ring
on the wrong hand. The other
woman's hands clutch my
Grandma's shoulder, claiming her.

The two
stand close.
Touching.

The snow on the ground is hard.
They should be cold
in the worn dresses pressed against
their legs by the wind.
And I wonder, with the cracking
photo in my hands,
how the three figures can warm each other.

Jill M. Haarsma

Angel

A man stands alone
at the edge
rolling pits in place of eyes
grotesque, bony, diseased hand
stretched out, reaching, empty.
People pass quickly, he can't
see them,
so they don't
see him
alone
at the edge
his mouth gaping like a
wound
calling
face upturned
to the light
and glowing,
and for one moment
he waits
not dying, because I
see him
through my window,
touch his cold,
revolting hand and
give him one
moment of my being alive.
He shows me
injustice and gives me anger.
I'm torn away,
his hand drops,
he falls,
dying,
and is gone.

Amy Hanenburg

Beyond

Your middle-aged face
reflects the whites and
blues of the screen
as does mine
when I stand behind
the french doors,
sipping hot tea,
watching you
watch
the unreachable
unfold before
your eyes.

I inhale your
cigarette smoke
with my tea.

Recalling a time,
or maybe just a
moment

when
you didn't
seem so

beyond.

*Danyale Temple,
honorable mention*



Colors of an Afghan

I sit, wrapped in the afghan
my children gave me
On a Mother's Day. That was
so long ago.
Its warmth protects me
now from the cold,
Sterile room. The bright colors
interrupt the monotonous white.
I sit waiting.

Those pictures there on my dresser
never lose their smile.
The one is of a happy couple,
but he is now gone ahead.
Next to it is all of us - father
mother, son and daughter.
We were a family then. We and our
little angels. That was so long ago.
I sit waiting for them.

They have their own lives now
with families of their own.
Busy, busy, busy.
Too busy for me.
I saw both of them along with
their precious little angels
Last year at Christmas. Or was
it the year before?
I sit waiting for them to come.

Time lingers here. Days drag
into nights into days.
I often lose track. But the pattern
of my afghan mirrors
Spring's green leaves
turning autumn's blaze orange;
Falling. Leaving only brown
tree stem behind.
I am then reminded once again
that time moves on.

Gretchen Vander Velde

To a Starving Mother and Her Child

Flies harass your nose, ears, eyes,
provoking the feeble swipe
of your hand.
Brushing the dry, stale desert air
across your sweaty face
collecting particles of sand.

Your dark skin absorbs the sun's beating rays,
Naked - except for the rag
cloth around your waist.
In your arms rests your naked babe,
searching for mother's
sagging, depleted, sucked-dry breast.

Your yellowed eyes peer out
from beneath sagging lids.
Screaming, but crying no tears
for help. Longing for rest
from this torture of hunger,
of pain, of motherly fears.

Your bones thinly wrapped
in a sagging coat of leather
skin. Proof that you've been
without. Deprived. Your body weak.
What little life you have left
is being sucked out.

Gretchen Vander Velde

A Single Mother

I wash dishes in the kitchen looking out
At the city through small panes of glass,
Listening to the children complain and pout
And worrying how I'll pay for gas.

I wish to walk the stair-step skyline
glittering above the city noise
where no one can disturb me
with bloody noses and broken toys.
The steam of hot water rises from the sink.
Hair sticks to my face, cheeks a warm pink,
My hands wrinkle in the suds.
Time has made me look old
and hot water has made me cold.
I let the water run until it nearly floods.

I throw the towel on the floor
And shut the water off tight.
But, it continues to drip some more
and it will drip the entire night.

Eileen Ringnald

When the Creek Split

At the end
after we swam
in the deep part
I remember, your mother
burned leeches off of our backs.
She worked with the same
smiling efficiency she used to send
us off two hours prior.
And we left, in the tube, without sunburn
or worry
floating in the rust
water between beer canned banks
and, remember,
you talked of goals from downtown,
touchdowns ending games,
the name of one of the Cardinals,
and farm life—castrating bulls
and hitting field mounds so fast
you prayed for better three wheeler
cushions,
and I, missing my action figures,
nodded in false understanding and smiles
as we drifted under a fallen trunk
curved in a swamp arc
though still in this bright Kansas.
You scared me with catfish lies,
let your gurgling laugh bubble
off your tongue and
through your lips.
And we stayed together
when the creek
split even though the
dividing island would have
swallowed our young bare feet
and even though the two brown
choices merged soon enough.
Burned by now, we
walked the final stretch
carrying our black circle,
your meaty arm swung around one
steaming side
my bony fingers awkwardly tugging the
valve stem, hoping it wouldn't leak
both of us waving at your mother with our
free hands
your right, my left,
our feet slipping on the rocky shallow
and we could already
taste the watermelon.

Kris Kling

Laci

Together we compiled
sticker albums, collected
puffy ones, metallic ones, smelly ones, and even
the ones that come on bananas and oranges,
ready to share with each other.

Together we swam in the Olympic-sized
pool at camp
doing handstands and flips under water;
later, we read silly notes from
her several devoted admirers,
only to laugh and fall asleep whispering
who we liked.

Separate we tested
the laws of gravity, searching
for what was big enough
to make us fly.

Separate we learned
only God's children fly,
but now she has a daughter.

Anna Minor, honorable mention

Trapping

I remember butterflies,
the little creations were ours to catch
with our clumsy old baseball caps.
We dove, we ran, merely to trap
the little wonders and keep
for ourselves.

Keeping,
we kept a lot.
Some instances have escaped and I do not remember—
but the good lingers.
The butterflies
endure through my childhood in
my trapped moments of good.
The best is better remembered.

Diane Auman, second place poetry

All I Saw

I understood death
by your eyes.
Bruised purple,
they haunted me.
Grown-ups kept murmuring
you were lucky to be alive.
They said you saw your father's chest
receive the impact
of the plane's
small
engine.
Your eyes saw his body
turn purple.

Lori Ronken

Pictures of Grandpa



Last summer, I joined my small town church in honoring my dad with a Sunday afternoon service commemorating his twentieth year in the ministry. Toward the end of the service, Dad stepped up to the pulpit and spoke his words of thanks:

"Thank you all for coming, but there is one person who isn't here and who I really wish could have been here—my father-in-law. Jan's dad died a year before we moved to this church, and he never got to see this community. He was always supportive of my ministry, and I deeply wish he could be here to share in our joy. I miss him...."

As I sat in my pew staring blankly at the pulpit that held my dad, my mind withdrew from the sanctuary full of people, and I reflected upon my dad's words, "Jan's dad died....He was supportive....I wish he could be here....I miss him." I remembered each bouquet of flowers on my grandpa's casket having a big white ribbon tied to it proclaiming Dad, Husband, or Grandpa in red glittery letters. It's what everyone puts on caskets, I guess, but looking back, it seemed a tacky representation of Grandpa's identity.

I didn't think about my dad much that day we honored him. In fact, I spent most of the day remembering. Later in the afternoon, after our guests had left the anniversary celebration, I sought refuge downstairs in the seclusion of the guest room to look for Grandpa in the old pictures kept in the black file cabinet.

"Hey Peanut, come sit on the stoop next to me." Grandpa Bert sits on his front steps smoking Marlboros—the ones in the red and white package.

"Why doesn't Grandma let you smoke inside?"

"I don't mind smoking on the porch. I can watch the world from here."

I perch my little body next to his old and wrinkled one, arching my back to be tall enough to look into his weather-worn face. He doesn't talk much when he smokes. He just looks—at the park across the street, at the cars coming down the highway from the east, at me. Each place has something to look for, and each time he looks, he has something new to see.

"Hey Bert, you got the grandkids here in town?"

We're sitting in the bowling alley on the west side of town. Grandpa has just ordered "the usual"—one egg over hard, raisin toast with peanut butter, and coffee with half-and-half. I get a doughnut and a Coke—the bowling alley is the only place that still serves Coke in glass bottles. Grandpa doesn't mind, and Mom and Dad aren't here to know about it.

"Yep, this is Becky—Jan's little girl."

Everyone at the bowling alley knows Grandpa. Men with names like Henry and Lawrence wearing feed caps and overalls ask Grandpa questions about the town water system, the weather forecast, and the church. Their wives, probably named Arthea and Gert, reveal dentured grins as Grandpa stops to say "Hello," politely tipping his red and grey CO-OP cap.

"Come here a minute, Peanut."

I scoot myself over to Grandpa's side of the orange and brown booth as he pulls four shiny quarters out of his coat pocket—pinball money. Grandpa knows I'm bored with municipal utilities and dentures. Smelling his Vitalis aftershave, I look up at his smiling eyes before running off to the game room.

"Oh, Dad, how fun! The kids will love this."

It's Christmas and my mom has just opened the trunk of Grandpa and Grandma's brown four-door. Inside, a five-year-old girl's dream—a life-size kitchen set including a sink, stove, refrig-

erator, and cabinet. Each piece is painted white and handmade by Grandpa from plywood. The faucet handles turn, the sink holds water, the cupboards open and close, and the refrigerator has a light.

"Hey Peanut, look inside Grandpa's trunk."

It is as real and as white as Mom's kitchen, and it is just my size. Grandpa knows I love to play house. What a perfect Christmas.

"Open your Bibles to Matthew 6, verses. . ."

We are sitting in church, and my grandpa and grandma are visiting us. As my dad begins to orate this morning's sermon, Grandpa Bert wraps my shoulder with his arm. Knowing where they are hidden, I reach for the treats in his suit coat pocket—little sugar-free hard candies. Grandpa Bert squeezes my tiny body and winks.

"Love you, Peanut."

"Rebekah Leigh, it's time for dinner."

I'm sitting in the guest room looking through the old pictures I found in the black file cabinet. My family is waiting upstairs for me so they can begin supper. I put the old pictures back in their yellowed box, closing it inside the file cabinet. I'm not Peanut anymore. I'm Rebekah Leigh. Looking in the mirror over the desk, I wipe my eyes, then climb up the stairs to the kitchen to rejoin my family.

Rebekah Dykstra

To Josh

who needs a geography lesson:

When you say WY is below SD,
leave.
Leave to where there is nothing
below—
just salt water and deep sunsets.
Wanting to forget IA, I went.
And there I saw a gray and pony-tailed man
standing before a dusk orange
sun setting on the ocean—
Everyone forgetting their geography comes to him.
Wanting to forget, I went.
But coming back, I have remembered.
The expanse of ocean stretching to the horizon
is just another field.
The same sun sets on both.
And being near to the salt
is not better
than knowing
to whom you are near.

Lori Ronken

Layers

I
every morning i stare half-asleep
out the bus window. pieces
of color flash against the gravel shoulder.
overhead the dump vultures circle,
circle pieces of what was ours.

II
when i was young, the river
bottom was low. barges have brought years
of waste down the Mississippi—
raising the bottom. i heard somewhere
in Iowa they ski down
what used to be a dumping site.

III
yesterday my son ripped through two
layers of paper board packaging and one
layer of plastic before the toy
Uncle Joey brought emerged. one
of the pieces said:
made from 100% post-consumer waste.

IV
the evening news told me
Dakota County was struggling again
to establish a landfill site suitable
to everyone and convenient
for industry.

Lori Ronken

Archeology Dig

Each time I am home on break, I pull out my photographs and papers
hoping to find the letter or the map that explains where
I have been and why I left
in the first place.
Half scientist, half orphan, utterly unprofessional:
a little bit desperate in the excavation site
that is my closet.

And when I try to leave my mother's house
I struggle, pack at midnight, reread each
receipt, each
unsent letter. Nothing escapes scrutiny, but
nothing is ever discarded, either.
Hours pass, rummaging through things I myself have collected.

I am Looking for the pattern, looking for the explanation,
looking for my self. The work, so far, yields little. And
working conditions could be better: the lighting is terrible.

Donna Milkie

Moving



It had been a snowy winter and the Detroit River was especially high in the spring of that year, 1987. My family and I drove over the river on the Ambassador Bridge whenever we went to eat at Mama Mia's in Windsor, Ontario on Sunday afternoons. Each Sunday afternoon, my dad and I, along with my mom and my brother, Joel, visited different places in Detroit and surrounding cities. Joel and I hated to leave our neighborhood baseball games and soccer tournaments, but Mom and Dad made us go with them every time. Mom said we were "making memories."

That year, I watched from the revolving restaurant on the top floor of the Detroit Renaissance Center as the Detroit River flowed south. I remember what I felt because of its truthfulness and its freedom.

I had been to the Renaissance Center before (or Ren Cen as the locals call it). One November, my family went to a home and garden show at Cobo Hall, right next to the Ren Cen. I gazed at the beauty of the four striking glass pillars that comprised the complex. Each pillar was taller and more beautiful than any other building I had ever seen. That night, the black glass reflected the light of the dying sun. As we entered the Cobo Hall area, I looked back longingly at the Ren Cen. It was near dusk, and I was beginning to get a glimpse of the Ren Cen's inside as fluorescent-looking lights were turned on by late-working employees, illuminating their file cabinets and desks.

The second time we went to the Ren Cen, my parents took my brother and me up to the revolving restaurant on the top floor. We were taking one of our typical Sunday afternoon trips, making some of Mom's memories. After parking in the downtown parking garage and walking through the city to the building, we rode the elevator up its glass case to the top floor. From inside the elevator, Joel and I looked out and watched the ground sink

as we steadily climbed up the shaft. Upon arriving at the top, we stepped out of the elevator box and on to the revolving floor, where movement was forced and regulated.

Then we sat down. The tables were round and encircled on one half by a crescent-shaped booth. This booth allowed all those who were seated to watch the city through the shaded glass walls that enclosed the restaurant. I ordered a glass of Pepsi, and I looked outside the Ren Cen windows. As our booth rotated around the building, I gazed at the river, at Canada, then Detroit, the city, the suburbs in the distance, at Belle Isle in the south, and then back to the river. Slowly, our vista moved around and around, never slowing down or speeding up. The river flowed south. The cars rode the Ambassador Bridge to Canada. The restaurant rotated around the top of the Ren Cen.

While we sat with our drinks and conversation, my parents asked my

brother and me if we wanted to move to Wisconsin. There had been talk of the move, a visit to a possible home, and long parental deliberations which I eavesdropped on after I was in bed. I was in seventh grade, and, yes, I wanted to move. In a year, I would be done with middle school and I would have to go to Stevenson High School—2500 students, none of which would know my name. Moving to Wisconsin couldn't be much worse. Joel nodded in agreement. They said we would move.

I slouched down in my seat, taking a long sip from my glass of Pepsi. I looked at the river, the bridge, Canada, and Belle Isle. The water was flowing south—slowly and evenly. The cars steadily drove the bridge to Canada. Belle Isle was actively filled with people. I sat in the revolving restaurant, knowing I would leave it to go down the glass elevator, back to my car, back home to pack my things, and later, back to the river.

Rebekah Dykstra

Common Ground

The omniscient sky looks over our muddled earth,
She sees all that resides upon this trodden turf.
Distant lands and lives in the horizon far from view
Mock the limits of my grounded eyes, I wish to
Be the sky, to follow as the ascending surge
Comes to light, to watch it rise from the frozen dirge
And see it sing and dance and grow to life,
Falling over birth and death, alighting joy and strife.
It has gone this way always—for several light-dark years;
Yet always diving from the sky, light disappears
And colors melt into one, while relations remain,
And the relations melt into each other all the same,
And I realize I'm more like the sun—looking to the sky and
down,
I am searching for a common ground.

Bryan Scichilone

My Sisters



My stepfather used to tell a joke. I remember it because I thought I understood it. I could laugh at it because I thought I understood.

"What happens when little White babies die?"

"They go to heaven."

"Right. What happens when they get to heaven?"

"They get wings."

"Right. What are they called when they get wings?"

"Angels."

"Right. Now, what happens when little Black babies die?"

"They go to heaven too."

"Exactly. And what happens when they get to heaven?"

"They get wings too."

"Right. And what are they called when they get wings?"

"Angels, too."

"Wrong. They're called bats."

They're called bats. I laugh, in my innocence, at the expense of an entire race of people. I call my Black sister a bat. I call myself an angel. There's something wrong.

Once in middle school, I was dressing in the locker room after a morning gym class. I was slipping into my jeans when someone commented, in reference to my tan skin, "You are so dark, Danyale." I replied, ignorantly, that pretty soon I'd look like Falisha. Falisha was one of two Black girls in my sixth grade class. She was my friend until that day. I call my Black sister a bat.

Three weeks ago my roommate and I had a Christmas party for the cast of the play we were both working on. I was sitting at the kitchen table, decorating Christmas cookies. I was frosting an angel when I noticed we didn't have any skin-colored frosting. I asked a friend if he would mix some other colors to make a fleshy color for my angel's skin.

"Sure, what color do you want?"

"Peach."

Another friend, who is Black, was sitting at the table when she heard my an-

swer. She looked at me, disgusted: "Why does flesh have to be peach?"

I don't believe I just said that.

Why does flesh have to be peach? It doesn't.

I call my Black sister a bat.

What was my stepfather thinking when he told me that malicious and cruel joke? What was I thinking, at twelve, when I responded the way I did to someone's comment about my tan skin? How could I be so inconsiderate as to think that flesh can only be peach?

I don't have any answers. Only questions. How can I unlearn every denigrating and prejudiced thought that has been in my brain since I was a child?

I took an African-American literature class last year. I learned a significant amount about the struggle of African-Americans throughout history. I hadn't encountered any of the literature throughout my short time as a student. I was struck by my unfamiliarity with the texts. Why didn't I know about this? Why hadn't anyone told me about the plight of African-Americans? Why hadn't anyone told me about the Black slave women who were forced into breeding children who would be sold into

slavery for the White man?

I read a book this summer about a young Native American boy named Little Tree. He grew up with his Cherokee grandparents and was taught how to live the Cherokee Way. I recall something his grandmother told him about The Way and what it means. She said, "Little Tree, in order to love something, you must first understand it." That's what I want—to be able to love my Black sister; but in order to do that, I must first try to understand her.

That is a difficult task. I can never fully understand what Paul Lawrence Dunbar means when he speaks about living beneath the "mask" or what W.E.B. Du Bois means when he writes about living under a veil. I haven't experienced how it feels to be Black.

Yet, it is my responsibility to try to understand and to seek the truth. I have an obligation to my Black sisters and brothers and to myself to love them as honestly as I can. I have an obligation to make someone think about the racial jokes that they tell, to be careful of the words I say, and to unlearn the distorted ideas about racial differences that have been enculturated into my brain since I was born.

Danyale Temple, third place prose



What They Gave Me

I am the girl
who was given
white skin.

They gave
me no
color
except
the growing
numbers of tiny
freckles
which they
told me
were angel's
kisses.

I have willed
nothing
of my
own
lot in life.

They gave
me the pure
bloods that
have somehow
made me
"superior"
even though
it chugs through
my veins
nearly
killing me.

They gave
me morals
and religion
and doctrine
and a faith
that can move
mountains
on sunny
days.

They gave
me barbies
with lacy
dresses,
little white
dolls
that cry
for their
momma
when you
lay them
in their cradle.

They gave
me
an education
so I could
be a
whatever
they
had in mind
and then give
it all up
to grow
white babies:
grand children.

They
gave me
their
lives to live.

Jill M. Haarsma

What i can't say to you

churns relentless in my soul
directly beneath the organ people call
the heart—I wouldn't know about that.
i've got black festering
under all the bright flashes
of white teeth
but you can't see it because
you've got those fat false-happy goggles
and blinders
and an oxygen mask
to protect you from the
deceit you refuse
to believe exists.
so you and i pretend, nod, smile
obliquely. i nod "yes-yes" and mumble
"fine-fine" and you retain that vacant smile
that denies the existence of a world where
people's hearts don't beat and where
they never show their teeth.

Kellie Gregg

Dance

I move through the
thick blackness
fog rolls
blanketing my path
lingering
at eye level
and I dance
in rings of hot coals
my bare feet
burning

and I am waiting
for them to
stop
turn
and let me stand

In rings of hot coals
anger flickers
they promise to
take my eyes
and tie my hands
cut my roots
and quiet my voice
with their hatred
and I can see
beyond
the black spider fingers
of trees
pulling at the
cotton fog

and I am waiting
for them to
stop
turn
and let me stand

In rings of hot coals
I dance
to drown out the
calls of others
praying to the
rhythm of the
machine
I do not join
I dance.

Amy Hanenburg

All I Can Do Is Watch the Way She Stands

Life's Accents

The monotype of the Loch Ness
is magical
hanging next to the artist's
other work
on display.

I stop at the spot just
three feet from the exhibit
every Tuesday, just past four.

I stare for a few minutes
until I close my eyes
and hear the voice echoing
off the walls—it's the most
enchanting piece of all:

For when I hear his Scottish voice
I am drinking
a cup of honey-sweetened tea
inside my house
on my couch.

Just a sip, is pleasure
enough for enduring
weeks of cold rain.

When I hear him say *turn of the century*
I am wearing
a 100% hand-knit wool sweater
of dappled
muted colors.

It wraps around
my body, curling
into my hollows.

When I hear him pronounce *Loch Ness*
I am taking
a Calgon bubble bath
in a brown round
marble tub.

I sigh and know
life cannot be
any better than this.

Jill M. Haarsma

I.
I watch her breathe under that clouded sky
still beneath its grey stirring
and she allows it to lower liquid arms
to mold itself to her form the way her long
dark hair once covered her
face her neck and ran itself down
her back before it ran itself away
And though I don't understand
the way it leans down and surrounds her
Someone has given to me
the sight of this shining woman
held naked within the raining shelter
melting her edges into its own
as the leaves far away and above me
sing softly of salvation.

II.
I sit beneath the sun and its messengers
and I watch the way she falls down
moving towards me always moving
and looking only near my eyes.
And though I cannot know
what she needs or give it
if I did
I see that she sinks as she stands
waiting for all the nothing I can do
and she will not admit need or lift her gaze
from the ground busy with swallowing her whole.
She stands, wholly broken in her holiness
And I sit as she's sinking
and I curse the light
that lights the way to such diminishing.

III.
Alone and seeing my reflection
in the way my memory walks them near me
I begin turning slow circles
surrounding the mirror
bending and twisting its eye
And though I cannot still my movements
and see as I saw them beyond the borderline
I am silently eyeing those angels
riding an ocean as they descend upon me.
I allow the blurring sky to become
the waves in which I dance
And I allow myself to weep as
a bald and shining woman
who once was disappearing
in a holiness too hungry to feed.
And I allow myself to weep.

IV.
I rise
weary
and watch my rain
drop its way to the center of where
there is nothing more for us to see
than the way we stand
in the air itself
and among the miracles it breeds.

Kelly Mowrer



Backyard Percussion

A

Bmm Bmm Bmm Bmm

makes me stop

and take a seat

the house lights are out

and so is this streetlamp

Bmm Bmm Bmm Bmm

I turn around once and see no one,

realizing the conversation has already begun

with this bass drum

toad croaking slow

low tones

in performance blacks tonight

knowing his fours

are foundation for

those to come

like the cicada that crescendos

in response to the continuing bass

clicking chirp claves

as if to

every hipshake and center step

of a finger snapping salsa dancer

whose matador cape spins

ballroom red and green

then around in new colors

jazzed

by a warm high hat shuffle

ba d-da ba d-da

the tip of this insect's stick

clicking as if for the Count's recreation

thin black tie loosened around his neck

shaking his big head

while another unseen adds a point,

waving

a tambourine simulation through the air

perhaps with leather pants and long hair

in partridge fashion

sixteenths in the same metallic

crisp clean minus the sizzle

plus the snap accent on one

now, someone's pounding a surdo

with one mallet and a bare hand

a syncopated attack and retreat

as bare legs dance on the drum head

the beetle's bald head down

telling old stories

in ancestral manner

accompanied by accented eighths

some hillbilly bug out of place

but in time with his

bluegrass washboard

eyes twitching a country grin

with every scratch

across his bib overalled chest

heard by the maraca player

grinning in his moonshineless echo

hands working a simple slide magic

TSS d d TSS d d TSS d

weaving all of the night's

thumps and clicks together

without the white gloves

of a conductor

and every other measure

the grasshopper soloist comes in to chat awhile

standing before a lonely snare

glancing over his shoulder

at the background world beat

in my backyard

speaking

in double paradiddle interjections

and ratamacue questions

that aren't answered

only debated throughout the night

Drops in E flat

I.

Raindrops hit the pavement
with short staccato notes.

First in a slow steady beat,
followed by an *accelerando*
to a downpour.

II.

The day plays like a dirge
with clashing chords
in a ritualistic progression.
Long, heavy, diminished tones
in clouded shades of black.

III.

After hours of rain,
it finally begins to *ritard*.
Drawing out its last phrases.
A diminuendo from *forte*
to *pianissimo*.

IV.

Water pours out of the drain pipes
as if one long
fermata
is held
to accentuate the completion
of a finished movement.

V.

Footsteps change meter
attempting to avoid puddles.
One two three, One two
One two three, One
Two three four.
A smooth legato stride
interrupted only
by accenting leaps.

Eileen Ringnald

Kris Kling

In Their Place



The children often watched the silly gray geese when they played outside. The geese chatted away the day like old women gossiping around coffee and always looked about to see what the other creatures were doing. Finding something wrong, the geese loudly gawked, and then walked away, having solved the problem.

The children often tried to sneak up on the geese when they slept. Instead, hearing the children before they came close, they chattered and challenged the children by fluttering their wings, letting the children know that they weren't wanted. Then, neatly tucking their wings in their place, the geese proudly strutted off. And the children laughed at their silly waddling.

But on days when the wind blew gently and steadily, the geese ran when the children came. They stretched out their wings and their feet soon just paddled the air. They flew with the children running behind them, arms outstretched, soaring like the geese. Then the geese realized they didn't really know how to fly. Their wings wavered in uncertainty and then their bottoms bounced to the ground. And they chattered at the silly children still soaring in the sky.

Kristi Roelfs

Spring Wine

Iowa's air in early Spring tastes of wine—
a draught of a holy elixir
smuggled from the High Middle Ages
(rumors of glory)

brooding, close gray skies
disintegrate! roil! fall away like spider's webs
before a holy wind

and look! a fierce sky!
blue-royal unfurled!—
centered with shining gold
(rumors of glory)

the earth drinks wine:
it is born again.

and all of the trees in the fields clap their hands
and all of the beasts rejoice
all of the fields sing for joy
and all the world cries, "Glory! Glory! Glory!"

all of us
drunk on the wine of Spring
(rumors of glory)

Lee Cerling

Wind And Stars

A child once said to me,
"I wish I was a sparrow."
I smiled and replied, "Why?"
The child turned and crawled
Up on my lap, his
Big brown eyes veiled partway
By his thick long lashes,
And with more eloquence than I
Ever heard from any sage, he
Explained,
"The wind is like the music
Of harps and flutes,
And that is what holds up a sparrow
When he flies. And if
He flies at night, the
Angels sing to him, and
He can see their twinkling eyes
In the stars that look down."
And with that, he curled up
Beside me on the couch
And fell asleep,
Never to know
That I got up and looked outside,
The winter night chill and clear,
And heard the angels' choir
And saw the twinkles in their eyes;
In wondrance at the simple, beautiful
Wisdom that flowed
From the mouth of a
Cherubic child of five.

Jennifer Peat

Resisting

I dream on the banks
of a calm I desire amid
the sputter and rapid thunder
that descends all around.
I watch the water fall
into the darkening pool.
The water droplets plunge, then leave and follow
each other along the fast-paced current.
But, the waterfall forms a curtain behind which
I cannot see.
I wonder if droplets stay behind—resisting
the flow of the stream,
and follow the path
of their own
choosing.

Diane Auman

Cradle



The girl's father was her greatest hero. When the sun began to make its way into the arms of the round hills on the horizon and her stomach began its murmur for supper, the girl would wait in front of the big living room window, anticipating the signal of a rattling old Datsun. When the white, paint-chipped car eased into the driveway and the emergency brake slowly click-clicked into place the girl yelled, "He's here!" Racing from the window, her younger brother two steps behind, she hurled herself at his legs, wrapping her arms tightly around them and bringing him to a chuckling halt.

Sometimes he was tired and simply fell asleep reading the newspaper after a quick hug and kiss, but other times she and her brother played romping games with him, their own personal superman. He would toss them high into the air and then catch them as they descended, cradling them in his arms. Best of all, when it began to get dark and their mother had called them in for bed, the girl and her brother would snuggle down and, pulling the covers up to their chins, they'd wait for the slow creaking that signaled their father's step coming down the hallway. "Shhhh, Dad's coming, pretend you're asleep," they'd whisper to each other, hands muffling uncontrollable giggles. "Let's scare him!"

It was delicious, the waiting in bed before his quiet presence entered the room. Will he tell us a story tonight? the girl always asked herself. Nathan was the hero last time, now it's my turn. Maybe he'll tell us another about the red-dress snitcher-snatcher or the yellow-beaked stumper-bumper.

As the door squeaked open, two heads poked out and open mouths screamed, "Yaaaaah!" His shoulders lifted, arms stiffened, and eyes widened. "Did we scare you, Dad, did we?" "Oooh, immensely," he shivered. He sat easily on the edge of either bed and the two bounced closer to him. No ghosts, midnight horrors or the little green man in the corner would trouble them when Dad had his big arm curled around them.

"Tell us a story, Dad, please? Please? Come on, it's not too late, we're not tired."

"Oh, alright," he sighed, rolling his eyes and smiling. They giggled and moved in closer. "Ooonce upon a time...." he began, and they were whisked away into a fantasy world where the heroes' names were their own and problems were solved by their ever-resourceful minds and imaginations. Sorrow in that world was drowned in laughter and tears were dried by the smile of a friend. Strange, mystical, and often silly creatures wandered there, calling out their names after the friendly fashion of the place. "Melissa! Nathan! Come play with us! Be our friend, our guest. We love you and we're glad you're here."

"The End," Dad said, and they tumbled back down to their beds with a gentle and almost discernible bump from the story-land situated somewhere up above the star-studded ceiling. Visions of that world still floated mistily around their heads as they, lids drooping, begged, "Another, Dad, another." "No, no, it's time for sleeping now," and he kissed them lightly on their drowsily pouting foreheads, ignoring the sleepy protests. Minutes later, eyes finally and reluctantly fell to rest and they drifted again into a strange and dim world where Dad's lingering presence lovingly guarded them.

Melissa Lovegren

Embrace

He does not know
that he should let you in,
His claim began at my birth
the same day as his.
Ever since, only two have belonged—
a dad his one daughter.

I want you to see
one of our birthday pictures,
where my pastel-sweatered shoulder
is enclosed in the arm
of his white business shirt,
and my long red hair
falls on both—
touching his hands, his arms, his chest.
And those tall candles, their fire
illuminating our matching complexions.

I've known where I am to fit
into the hold of his arms,
They know nothing but to guard and possess.
They show no signs of release
not even to make room for another.
I, too, know not how
I could loose it.

Rebekah Dykstra

Cherry Vanilla

He always smokes the same tobacco
Cherry Vanilla
in the same pipe.
Hand carved hardwood
ornate scrolls and lines
play out over the stem
bursting onto the bowl,
which throws a subdued
deep red orange glow into
the cup of his hand.
Cherry Vanilla wafts to each corner
winds up the stairs
seeps through the vents
encasing every movement we take
in sweet soft, thin ash
and when I leave
he will remain
a deep red glow,
a cherry vanilla specter
in each pocket, each fold
of my clothing.

Amy Hanenburg

Incident

I
Spider leg still kicking, severed on the windowsill
arachnid pulled from limb—
my failed assassination attempt
in the name of self-defense.
Foreign policy: If annihilation is not achieved, next best is Disarmament.

II
The unarmed spider
too frightened for indignation,
too frightened for pain, even—but the pain,
if spider could stop to
catch her breath, to feel the pain,
the unmistakable, unremitting agony of stolen bone,
throb of limb lost: phantom pain. But it is shock,
not pain, that keeps her there.

III
Sixth-sensed, I feel for the seven-legged creature
whose existence has been altered, irreparably.
But it is too tragic for fascination, and too late for remorse.
I kill the spider, and her leg.

Donna Milkie

Waterproof

That morning you donned your heavy rain coat
and waterproof boots,
and I fretted.

It was not so very long ago, yet, too long, it seems.

But I did not voice my fears, though, for you would have
gently laughed at me, tugged at your coat, and told me
"You worry too much."

Yet, not enough it seems.

And now, in the quiet solitude of the eventide,
I watch the sun set and the moon rise—

Trading places in their vigil over earth,
and the sea, the very sea, that caught you, covered you,
pulled you under, took your breath from you—your life.

It took you away from me.

The full moon in its radiance
shines down on me, and the sea, in pure resplendence.
I feel the cool darkness of the frozen shadows, as I watch
the sea; how peaceful and calm it is.

Almost like a sheet of glass, no movement,
no angry waves lashing, pulling at the shore.

And finally, I stand and face the sea.

Crystal Sipes

Jim

We didn't like being
at Grandma and Grandpa's house
with our aunts and uncles
and their conversations
about nothing but corn fields
and the people across the street.
Then you shattered the basement window,
escaping the salted waters
of that dead sea, our family.

Aunt Carol—your mother—
never could scold you.
And, now you live
under state control,
I cannot recall another
melody as pleasing,
nor harmony as dissonant
as your laughter
when you broke that basement window.

Knowing you threw the breaking ball,
your pride overflowed
in the river of your laughter,
releasing us for a time
from our family's false bond.
I smiled at your courage—
neither of us anticipated the dam
awaiting your reckless spirit.

Today, I wonder
if you're laughing at broken windows.
I am still tasting the salt
of this ocean, our family.

Rebekah Dykstra

Response to Boredom

Outside of these rooms white square
Blue beckons.
Snow melt, naked black trees,
yellow grasses from summer past—
and over all broods—
Spring's breath.

Come dancing with me, my love—
outside these rooms,
outside this climate, controlled,
outside artifice,
grinding, grinding arrogance.

Let us go dancing—
celebrate the Lord of the Spring
and the Lord of the Dance.

Let us go embracing—
lifting heads,
singing heartsongs

These small rooms crush the spirit,
bind life,
steal our joy

Go dancing with me, my love—
outside these human walls,
outside these lingering frosts

We will leave well enough alone,
but we will go dancing,
beneath the blazing blue.

Lee Cerling

Selling Life

adeeb adeeb adeeb atwo
we got two do I see more
2adeeb adeeb atwo50
adeeb look at this creamer
look here two75 over here
Three over there three25
in the back adeeba
deeb adeeb four!
POINT JUMP TURN LOOK
SHOUT THE NUMBER A LITTLE
LOUDER
MAKE IT SOUND FAST BE FAST
KEEP GOING DON'T STOP THEY'LL
BUY RAISE THE BID TIL IT'S
SOLD!

TAKE A BREATH.
Look at this here we have
an earthenware butter dish
it's worth at least a dollar
do I hear one
it's made in Sioux City
I got one adeeb there's two
adeeb adeeb adeeb no cracks
real fine adeeb three
do I hear more adeeb adeeb
three50 and it is
SOLD! to the lady in blue.
What do we have in this box
some small frames
cookie sheets
utensils
who will pay four adeeb
here we go four25
around in back adeeb
anyone else five adeeb
here's a nice collection
adeeb adeeb adeeb afive75 adeeb
six50 seven and SOLD! for eight25
to the man by the post.

Lori Ronken

The Servant

I always see life where death seems to live.
I pray for times I remember to pray.
I serve through giving, for I want to give.

Prayer is an action. Why do I forget?
I walk inside of my heart and my mind.
I always see life where death seems to live.

If you look inside me, what do you see?
I rejoice in Hurt! It teaches me how
to serve through giving, for I want to give.

A raped woman cried, but told no one why.
The ugly girl hid and begged for a mask.
I always see life where death seems to live.

The Comforter felt all pain, ugliness
and made them his own, so take up His yield
and, freely, serve through giving—want to give.

His richness was sought by the hurt in me,
I know, I have enough. But I watch, for
I always see life where death seems to live.
I serve through giving, for I want to give.

Rebekah Dykstra

Asylum

I hear them talk
about me
their faces twist
mouths turn
as they talk about me,
and I hear,
while I look out
through my reflection
sitting before my window,
rocking rocking
I hear them.
One tear bleeds down my
flaming cheek,
drops
splattering on my clasped hands
laughing, shaking softly
I hear them.
I watch, rocking between
yes and no,
tomorrow and never,
and I hear as they
steal bits of my name
with their cold glances.
I hear them.

Run in circles black sliver moon
run around
cut the line of blue
run too fast to keep your blood
run away from me.

Laying on the sidewalk
arms out, pulled tight
like a new skin drum head
forced tight by its metal cage frame
one hand gripping the end of
your path
one hand dripping
red wrath
catching darts of light
in my teeth
if I could ask
if you would
if I could
you might

run in circles black sliver moon
run around
cut the line of blue
run too fast to keep your blood
run away from me.
You might never talk
about me
you might talk to me
if I could ask
if you would
if I could
you might say
it's safer in the dark
and touch me
and I might not cry,
and you might hear me
take possession of my secret,
and stay
while I call

run in circles black sliver moon
run around
cut the line of blue
run too fast to keep your blood
run away from me.

I hear them.

Amy Hanenburg

Dreamscape (An Awakening)

keep dreaming, you've time to dream
you've time to feel
it's beautiful to feel.

shut in the world and watch the bright flowers growing
in the white sidewalk,
float your easy mind on jade green roses
with feathers for thorns
as guiding kaleidoscope eyes shake your naked awakening
to the melting marriage of fantasy and form
capture the sweet enrapture of fleeting moments—
dally in shallow pools of cool, jeweled majesty

stay here rooted lily-still—soaking,
sing to the moon on a sunlit day,
reach for the climbing sky,
paw at the wind with an open hand;
you've time to wave your wind-cut arrows at the sun

Bryan Scichilone

Déjà Vu

I keep going back to what I've already seen,
already seen,
cut and framed images that frame me
every other day, sometimes from a dream
I had maybe three years ago,
then
let go.

I was in the wings and the crooked teeth
in the black holes in front of me froze
for a moment in that same blue light,
that doorway from before
broken by the turning of heads.
They accused me of being quiet, which I was,
I was three years ago in a dream
quiet, before I went on
to the next time.

It was in the same space but music,
jazz, I held my rose sticks,
others held trumpets.
They wondered why I was silent
and I had been there before, staring at the sagging
faces and the director, turning in that same manner
from three years ago.
Gaping air from the open exits blowing
me to speak "this has been happening every other day,"
he said
"you've been living it for the past two weeks every day"
and broke it all with his shaking head,
tossing me to the wings that I've already seen,
already seen, and I can't move,
the faces don't move until the count,
and I started playing

then slept
to wake in rehearsal the day after next
with actors I didn't know before this year
in their places
their faces asking the same questions
governing my head, forcing me to look again
at what I've seen before
saying or asking "this was supposed to be?"
The actors frozen, then turning slowly around
like the blue teeth,
like him in the trumpets,
blown by holes hushing each other's steps
dressed in grease paint and rags the way I wanted them
three years ago
before I had ever seen this at all.
They're all looking
and turning
and I forget them away
knowing I'll remember them back
the next time I go spinning back
back to where I was
back to where I am
back to grabbing at the edges
of that slipping picture frame.

Kris Kling

Hiding

I am young
and I am hiding
sitting here in the
blue dark shadow
of the cave in my
wall.
They have gone
and left me again
here, alone with
them.
Him and one of the
childkeepers.
So I have gone and
left him
and the childkeeper
out there
and I will stay here in
my blue dark shadow
and talk to carpet scraps
until they come back
and bring
home
with them
so I can go to sleep
in the blue dark
under my bed
listening to the rain
give rhythm
to the night-time song
of the carpet scraps.

Amy Hanenburg

Bogeyman

Each time I climb the winding stair
—each time th' ascent I make—
I pray the Lord my soul to keep
or, if I die, to take.
For though I know I am unfollowed
the blind heart makes assertions wild.

The eyes know better, know they'd find
nothing if they looked behind.
Still, they cannot make a move
the heart's conjecture to disprove;
For what if heart were right this time,
and eyes confirmed the monster mime?
Then I were lost who stayed there put,
who fore nor back could move a foot.

So, now I go me up this stair
I pray the Lord to lead me there
to the top whereat I'll find
real Peace—No need to look behind
to ascertain, Have I been followed
up this step, with heartbeat shallowed.
The heart is racing like its owner;
for it, like she, thinks all is over.

With a mortgage on their Courage
do mortals ever make the climb
and trust—and run—yet one more time.

Donna Milkie, honorable mention

(w)resting Oblivious

Oblivious, drifting aimlessly, unknowingly foregoes
lividness not filling up the air
but middling in the emptiness somewhere.

And at the end is us
who would want the living part to oblige
to the right or to the left.

But Oblivious has no loyalty to the poet,
to the scientist,
to the philosopher in me.

It just wanders through us all, obliviously.

Oblivious has no secrets—save one.
After scandal, after praise, after work or fun
it will never recall what it has done...not even some.

Mindless indifference being neither good nor bad, smart nor dumb...
we label it 'oblivion.'

Bryan Scichilone

Break On Through

As I walked along the stony beach
The ebb of tide just out of reach
I met a man of little sense
Who walked on both sides of the fence
And offered him my desperate plea,
"Reveal to me life's mystery!"
He lurched and writhed and shouted out
A message of such savage clout
A message that reflected now
A classic song, eternal vow
He climbed upon a nearby wall
He teetered, staggered, didn't fall
He raised his head, stretched out his hands,
Revealed to me the desert sands
The sands of time that isolate
The timeless immortality of fate
He answered yes, he said he could
Clairvoyant, he alone now stood
He whispered aloud, yet made no sense
He answered in ambivalence,
"I am the lizard king,
I can do anything."

Bryan Scichilone

Thoughts of Suicide

Suppose we, you and I, were
crossing the highway when a
semi came barreling towards us, and
I pushed you out of the way and got
hit myself.

At my funeral they would say I was
a poet of heroism, and bury me with
a necklace of roses like the ones that
hang upside down in my mother's kitchen.

Many words would be whispered across my
eternal sleeping bag as the beautiful
sun of my past would set
behind the striped and starred flags of
my new neighbors.

The next morning, mist would settle like a
veil, over me and my resting friends. The
world would be born once more
and the fingers of forgetfulness would
begin to strangle my face out of your
mind.

Krista Willis

Untitled

i don't care not even a flinch
what time does to anyone but me
look at me my face my body my
god my hands myohmyohmy

[smiling:] you haven't changed a bit
not one damn bit cept it's

a lie cuz you must look worse than me
and I already look simply aw
ful and am not sure how life
can continue looking so horrid

you have Lines at the edges of your eyes
Ha I don't
mine are across the brow
con (despite face cream and gels) centrated
between the eyes
and Oh My God Look at me

Lori Ronken

Smoking in Bed

I am cruelly awakened
by the summer sun slicing through the cheap venetian
blind, a K-Mart blue light special.
I yank
on the cord to block the piercing light, but it's
broken.
I need
aspirin but it's too far to the kitchen. Instead
I reach
for a Camel and a book of matches from the
Highway 27 Motor Lodge.
I light
up and lean my burning head against the cool wall.
I let
the ashes fall to the floor.
Wouldn't that make a great headline?
Woman Dies in Fiery Blaze While Smoking in Bed.
The Surgeon General reports that smoking can be
hazardous to your health.
So what.
The neighbors would
gossip: not much else to do
in this one-horse town.
Smoke and dust intermingle, and I sneeze.
I look
for the remote, pluck
it out of rumpled folds in the sheets.
Click. Click. Click.
Oprah. Donahue. Sally.
Oprah must be a rerun, she's fat.
She's talking with people who have been
abducted by aliens.
I wouldn't
mind being abducted by aliens.
Any place would be better than here.
I wonder
what they would look like.
Maybe like us, so we couldn't tell who was human
and who was Alien.
I've watched *Cocoon* too many times.
Click. Click. Click.
One Life to Live (that's one too many)
The Bold and the Beautiful (the weak and the ugly)
Guiding Light (the burning end of my cigarette?)
Click. Click.
Jeopardy (I'm in . . .)
Press Your Luck (press this)
Click.
My cigarette has gone out.
I grab another, and smoke permeates me.
I flick
the remote off the bed; it lands hard
and pops open—two AAs slide out.
So what.

Crystal Sipes

She said

Everyone knows
what's preterit is past
But I must insist on some rules before we begin.
Your precursor, who considered himself an expert in
the mechanics of language and love,
tried to make me the subject of his predicate,
the object of his preposition.
He was demonstrative and possessive by turns.
He made me present tense with notions of my past perfection.
He made me the indirect object of his disappointment:
He gave me hell.
You should know, then, that I am an independent clause,
and I will not be your subordinate.

Donna Milkie

First Draft

I'm really not feeling all that poetic tonight
I said turning towards you
You shrugged set your bottle on the floor
and said it didn't matter in this case
So don't expect me to write something beautiful
or full of intrigue in the morning
I said nothing that will be
anthologized or anything
You scowled took my hands and said
you didn't particularly give a shit
But just so you know
I said
I'm not that great with metaphor
or simile
or creating gaps in the text
So don't be looking for a wonderfully crafted
poem filled with provocative ambiguity
ok you said and
your eyes locked into mine
and I was pulled hungrily
in your general direction
Don't worry
honey
you said already involved i
won't
even remember
your
name.

Kelly Mowrer

Terminal Skywalk



I knew the skywalk system intimately by the time it was all over. I could get from here to there and back again in the same amount of time it took to feed my mom. You had to go northwest out of the building, at least it felt like northwest, out into the skywalk. Straight took you into a building with a swimming pool and an eye doctor. Right took you to Penney's. Left took you to another skywalk that went south, but I never went south.

I could walk the skywalk almost with my eyes closed, but I never did because the other people in the skywalk were scary. So I would be gone only long enough to give my mom time to eat and then I would come back.

My mom had a private room. Private rooms are good things. I hated her room. I loved visiting her. I hated that she was there.

I learned quickly words that most ten- and eleven-year-old girls have never even heard of and wouldn't know what to do about if they did. Terminal did not mean computer screen or have anything to do with airports. Terminal meant dead. I hated the word terminal.

It wasn't so bad in the beginning. Mom looked like Mom and smelled like Mom and felt like Mom and acted like Mom. But beginnings only last for a little while and then they become middles and ends. I tolerated the middle, but I hated the end.

The end took a year. A year of skywalks and IVs and words like chemotherapy. A year of always having to wash my hands at the hospital and washing my hands out of habit at home.

Mom was home for the summer. She did normal mom things, but not at a normal mom speed. I hated watching her get tired and looking at me with eyes that knew more than I did. I was wretched that summer. I was furious, and I didn't understand.

I remember watching Dad begin to not care about himself anymore. Sometimes he scared me. But then again, sometimes everything scared me. I

learned to be afraid of doctors and needles and terminals. I hated terminals more than ever.

Mom stayed home long enough to see my brother and me off to school and then she left and I became a skywalker again. This time the skywalks became a different world where words like terminal didn't exist. Here I could ignore the real people and create my own time and space and forget everything else. The skywalks were my momentary world where I had control over what existed and what did not. Nothing happened out of my control. Nothing didn't have an explanation.

I couldn't stay a skywalker. Mom decided that intensive care was too intense and that tubes were annoying because she knew what terminal meant too. So Mom came home, or at least close to home. But there weren't any skywalks, just a lobby with the TV mounted to the ceiling so that I got whiplash watching it.

I missed the skywalks. There I had created special skywalk friends that only believed what I allowed them to believe. Here none of my friends knew what terminal was and they were scared when I

said it. So they didn't talk to me. They just whispered to each other about terminals. Teachers whispered too and shook their heads. I shook my head too—my neck had a permanent crick in it from the ceiling TV.

Terminal happened shortly after twelve a.m., Tuesday, November 6, 1984.

My dad wanted me to go see the effects of terminal at the terminal home, but I didn't. My brother got mad because I wouldn't go. But I couldn't accept that terminal had a meaning and that terminal could really happen. Terminal meant terminal.

The box that held my mom's shell was buried in a country cemetery and my dad had them put a stone there. Mom's name is on it. So is Dad's, even though he hasn't been terminated yet. But the scary thing is that my brother's name and my name are carved somewhere on the stone too.

I know that someday people will whisper terminal about me and then run down the skywalks and meet my skywalk friends who don't believe in terminal.

Kellie Gregg

Once Again

In an antediluvian attic,
somewhere,
a forgotten cedar chest
occupies a hidden corner.
Cobwebs, hanging heavy from
the weight of crystalline dust,
cling to the fading wood.
Inside,
faded memories reside—
(from the lives of Frank
and Annabelle Ward).
A pocket watch with broken springs
lies on a yellowed wedding dress.
Two black leather gloves
seem to grasp a packet of old letters—
letters once read by a
blushing lover, in secret.

To the addressed "dear lover"
the letters were cherished treasures
kept hidden under a pillow.
Now, with decades of dust
cloaking the precious words,
they are only waiting, longing,
to be read, and treasured,
once again.

Crystal Sipes, honorable mention

The Clock

The clock stopped as the world slept
and a man cried in anguish that
the pendulum could tick no longer
and that a time had ended.

The children wailed as they witnessed
the clock and its sad face
locked at a grim and desolate time
reminding of another still face.

The man and the children, overcome with
despair, could only stare silently
at the other pale face that would
no longer be a part of their lives.

Laughter would have desecrated the silence
of the clock and of its lost
heartbeat and so the man and the children
did not smile at anything.

Dust and memories collected in piles
in the sterile house and the man
and the children did not notice as
the rest of the world slipped by.

An echo of the lost heartbeat would tick
here and there and every room
resounded with the chiming
of a lost melody as a piano sat...

silently waiting for the caress of
the now still fingers, lost forever
to the man and the children and
condemning their world to somberness.

The days were long and empty and silent
as the clock stood neglected
in the corner of the room
and the glass developed a film and

obscured the view of the pendulum.
One day, the man and the children laughed.
A small careful laugh, and the reverberations
shook loose some of the dust on the clock.

As the idea of laughter became less foreign,
the dust fell from the clock and swirled
and choked the man and the children
and they were caught for a moment as

they stared at the frozen hands...and then
the man opened the clock with trembling
hands and with a calloused finger,
caressed the pendulum.

The children held their breath as the man's hand
stopped its movement, and then with a sigh and a
tentative smile the man set the pendulum in motion
and the children laughed and the man smiled as

time began again.

Kellie Gregg

Mercy

death
was mercy
thrust
at you
cloaked violently
in white
and red

and though
I walk
with stars
across the sky
and watch their
bright disappearing
and pray for
arms
too distant
to embrace
me

and
I feel
my steps
slowly cementing
and I lament
the breaking
of the sky
in its mirrored
frozen
weeping

and
I hear
a cry
wretched
and alone
the wailing
I do not
recognize
though
the bitter
taste
corrodes
my mouth

though I listen
to the dying leaves
speaking with tongues
I don't comprehend

though I taste
the blood and rain
though I bare
my flesh
pleading
to the clouds
to continue
to pour
their burning

though I call your name

though I call your name

though I call out your name

dying
in my mortality
in my survival

though I beg
mercy
for myself

though I stretch
my fingers
to you

close your doors

rest

rest.

Kelly Mow

Treasures



"You know we're not supposed to go into Grandma's attic, Bobby. Don't you remember we got in a lot of trouble when we played with Uncle Tim's train set in the basement?" Theresa's pleading whispers fell on stubborn ears.

"Aw, that one was your idea, that's why it didn't work." He ducked his sister's fist. "Besides, if we're quiet no one will know and we can look around all we want. Maybe we'll find some gold coins or something like Tommy's dad did."

The old white door creaked softly as they managed to open it slowly. They paused for a moment to listen for their mother's footsteps. Then they turned their heads to look into the dark and empty space called the attic. Bobby put his hand on the wall to feel for a light switch and flicked the dim light bulb on. The light only showed dusty old steps that led into another dark domain. But curiosity kept them from abandoning their plan.

"You go first," they both nervously said.

Brother and sister looked at each other, took another long look at the stairs and paused to listen for their mother's call. They half expected her to come rushing up the hallway at any moment. But nothing happened. Gulping down their fears and anxiety, they cautiously placed their feet on the first step and waited for a tattle-tale creak to give them away. No sound erupted from the dusty wood covered with clear vinyl sheets. Proceeding one step at a time, they traveled about halfway up the stairs until the wood beneath them did groan. Both found that they couldn't move because every muscle was strained to listen for danger, either from above or below.

But as they waited, their eyes adjusted to the dim light from the dusty light bulb. Their fears were soon put aside as Bobby pulled on a string from the ceiling and another dim and dusty light bulb turned on. The shadows they feared before were only inanimate objects that hadn't been touched in some time. They could only imagine what treasures lay beneath all the dust and cobwebs.

"Wow! Would you look at all that

stuff! And all those boxes and trunks with even more stuff! There ought to be a lot of treasure hidden somewhere. Grandma won't even mind if we have some because she's got so much!"

"If she has so much treasure that she can just give away to us, then why are we sneaking around up here?"

Bobby shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe she's just forgotten what's up here or wants to save it all and buy a mansion or something fancy." He began going through an old box of Saturday Evening Post magazines and Superman comic books. "Maybe there's an old treasure map or something in here besides these old things."

"Look at that statue!" Theresa pointed towards a figure next to a small window. The light that sneaked through the dust on the window pane made it appear even more spectacular. "It looks like that statue we learned about today in history class that doesn't have any arms. But this one's got to be even more famous because it doesn't have any legs or a head either!" She walked over to it and pulled off a layer of cloth and dust drifted into the sunlight. "Wonder what it's doing up here?"

"Maybe Grandpa brought it home after World War II. Here, look at these old hats and clothes in this trunk. Ew! They smell terrible! Who would want to wear all this stuff?"

Bobby sneezed when he blew the dust away to look at the colors better. He scrunched his face when he realized they weren't his favorite color, red. The cloth sounded like paper when he touched it.

"I don't know." She looked at the clothes with the same scrunched face. "Maybe they're just Halloween costumes." Theresa pulled out a leather-bound book from a rusty trunk. "Look at this, Bobby. There's a whole bunch of pictures here, black and white pictures of things and people."

"And they're dressed in those old clothes!" Theresa laid the photo album on the floor as her brother sat down beside her. They turned the brittle pages together. Pages that contained pictures of a place and time neither one of them had known. Pictures of children playing in

front of their grandma's house, of shiny black cars that they only saw in museums, of gigantic horses pulling sleighs, and of women in long dresses with men in overalls standing by their side. "I wonder who all these people are and why they're at Grandma's house?"

"And what do you two think you're doing?!" Bobby and Theresa jumped at the sound of their mother's voice behind them. "Come down this instant and apologize for what you've done! Snooping around in your grandmother's attic. That's inexcusable!" Their mother's voice was loud and nonnegotiable.

"Uh-oh. We're in trouble now, big time."

"I'm going to bring this photo album down," Theresa said with determination. Her brother gave her a quizzical look but figured they couldn't get into any more trouble as it was. They trooped downstairs under the angry glare of their mother. They didn't even attempt to try their usual excuses.

"What were they doing up there, Eloise?" Then she noticed the photo album in her grandchild's arms. When she saw the determined curiosity in their eyes she was surprised instead of angry. "Why did you go up there? You two didn't break anything did you?"

The two snoops timidly shook their heads. "I brought this down though because we didn't know what it was." Theresa handed her grandma the photo album. When their grandma didn't say anything right away, both folded their hands behind their backs and lowered their heads. They prepared themselves for a long speech about the evils of sneaking around in an attic. Another version of the don't-sneak-around-in-the-basement talk, they assumed.

Their grandma held the leather-bound album and looked at it for a moment before placing it on the kitchen table. She motioned for Bobby and Theresa to sit beside her. Their minds raced with puzzlement. Although their grandma had never punished them before, she had never behaved so quietly either. It was as if she had forgotten where they had been.

Theresa's voice brought their grandma

out of her trance. "I think the camera was broke, Grandma. The pictures are all black and white like someone forgot to color them in."

Their mother and grandma chuckled and smiled. "No, that's the way they're supposed to look like. That's the way pictures were taken when I was a girl. Just black and white." She lifted the cover open and placed a picture back into its corner hinges. "Those were the days."

"Who's that?" Theresa pointed to a man in overalls standing behind two horses. "And what's he doing?"

"That's my father standing beside two horses that he used to farm with, Pete and Blaze. See that piece of equipment behind him? That was a plow he used."

"That kind of looks like that rusted metal thing in the grove," Bobby said.

"It probably is. That's where most of the old machinery went when we got tractors in 1948. Yes, we used horses to farm with until I was grown. There were a lot of things back then that you don't see today."

"Here's a picture of the windmill that used to pump water to the cows. I'm sure you've seen that behind the barn but it doesn't work anymore. And here's some pictures of the farm when I was a girl. The barn, the house and a few corn cribs are all what's left now. We tore down the chicken coop twenty years ago to build a machine shed. And your grandfather tore down some more buildings so he could build to suit his machinery and growing herds of livestock."

"But back when I was a little girl, my brothers and sisters would play hide-and-seek in the buildings all afternoon. On some Sunday mornings, my brother and sister and I would sneak off to the garage where Pa kept the car. You see, if we didn't want to go to church we'd jump up and down on the seats after a dust storm and get so filthy that Ma just gave up on us. Of course, we had to deal with Pa when he found out."

"What did he do?"

"Oh, he punished us for being naughty. And his punishment was a little harsher than you've ever gotten." She paused for a moment, deciding whether or not to add more detail. Theresa and Bobby looked at each other, wondering if her Pa was a cruel monster. "Things were just different back then and we thought nothing bad about the way he treated his children. He wasn't like what you're

thinking.

"You see this boy here? That's my brother, Bruce. Most people don't remember him because he died when he was only sixteen. He collapsed one day doing chores and complained that his side hurt. Pa took him to the doctor who operated on Bruce immediately. It was his appendix, the doctor said. But Bruce didn't get better when he returned home. He had such a high fever, he didn't know where he was. The doctor said he couldn't do anything more and we couldn't afford to go to a better hospital. We couldn't even afford the train ticket to get there." She closed her eyes to stop seeing her brother lying there. "We buried him the next week in the cemetery lot behind our grove. That was the only time I saw Pa cry."

Theresa bit her lip while Bobby stared at the picture of his great-uncle. Neither one felt they could say anything until their grandmother opened her eyes and turned another page.

They spent the rest of the afternoon looking through the old black and white photos of their grandmother's childhood while she recounted only the fond memories of the past. Of planting firecrackers under corn stalks and watching them rocket into the sky. Of stealing watermelons from the garden patch and being caught by tattle-tale seeds that had begun to grow. And of going into town on Saturday nights to hear band music on the streets and to buy some black licorice candy. Bobby and Theresa never imagined that black and white photos could tell such wonderful and colorful stories.

After their lunch of chocolate chip cookies and milk, Bobby and Theresa headed outside to diffuse some of their energy. After a lively game of tag in the hay mow, they rested in some loose hay mixed with straw. Hay stuck out of their clothes and each removed the scratchy stalks from their sides.

"I dare you," Theresa said teasingly with a hint of boldness after they both caught their breath.

"Dare me to do what?"

"I dare you to go into that old cemetery behind the grove and touch Grandma's brother's tombstone."

Bobby looked at her sideways. They both were afraid of cemeteries because they feared a hand would break through the ground, grab them and pull them under like they had seen in a late-night movie before they were shooed on to bed. "You

know what might happen, don't you?"

"I don't think it will. That was only a movie, remember? Aren't you brave enough?"

"Yes, I am. But you're coming with me just in case." The children climbed down the barn ladder, walked past the old windmill and corncribs, through the grove and past the old and rusted machinery until they reached the edge of the grove. They paused to look at the old cemetery.

The tangled barbed wire twisted with grass as high as the fence and formed a thin wall around the six stones. Mowed grass encircled the individual markers although the grass that escaped the regular cuttings had grown to cover some words. The children were awed by its simpleness instead of fearing it. It was not the cemetery in the movie. Yellow bursts of dandelion petals shone even brighter in the summer sunlight. A gentle breeze wove tall strands of grass into a natural bouquet. Swallows skillfully and gracefully dove around the children in search of food. And the clouds skated across the sky in ever-changing formations.

From beyond the fence, their eyes labored to find the stone that marked their great-uncle's grave. But the stones were so old that the chiseled print had long since eroded away. The words could no longer be read from a distance. "We'll have to go inside to see which one is his," Bobby said. Neither said a word as they cautiously climbed through the fence and searched.

"Here it is! Bruce Van Kley, born 1920, died 1936." Theresa pushed aside some grass that covered part of the tombstone but there were no more words said about him. Brother and sister stood there for a few moments remembering the pictures they had seen of Bruce. Together they wondered what he had once been like as a boy and if he had done all those things their grandma once did. And then silently, as if reading each other's minds, they knew what had to be done. Bobby pulled out the weeds and grass that covered the name and dates while Theresa gathered dandelions and sweet clover. Together they placed the flowers where their grandmother once did when she was a young girl.

Kristi Roelfs, second place prose

Old Man, Seated

Long blades of dark green grass
Climb up around the pair of boots,
Faded brown leather worn
To the shape of the feet inside.
Shredded laces weave their way
Up to meet two
Whitened, tattered blue jean
Cuffs losing their grip.
Weathered denim covers both legs
Sufficiently, except for
The large ripped hole, strings breaking free,
Exposing a pale bony knee.
The faded blue travels up to encounter
A plaid of diminishing color.
Navy, green, gray, a stripe of red
Systematically decorate the flannel.
Small, round navy buttons crawl
Up the middle stopping at the collar
Surrounding the pale, gaunt neck
Supporting an equally gaunt face.
Skin partially covered with gray stubble
Sags at the cheeks and beneath the eyes.
Mauve lips press gently together
Showing neither joy nor sadness.
Pointing sharply over the lips,
A nose leads up to the eyes,
Which struggle to remain open,
Gazing dreamily straight ahead.

Gretchen Vander Velde

Waiting with Grandma

Late at night,
Coffee and hot chocolate,
Bowl of popcorn, some M&M's.
A deck of cards;
Playing rummy,
Grandmother, grandchild, sit and wait.
Grandchild's constant chatter
Fills the air, not understanding.
A cigarette butt in the ashtray;
A cigarette between the old woman's
Pursed lips.
Tired,
Old, too old for this,
Relic.
A green lollipop in the child's mouth,
Green lips and chin, dribble.
Innocent,
Young, too young for this,
Child-like.
I learned how to divide today,
The child declares.
Hmmm, is the reply.
It's your draw.
More chatter,
An M&M rolls under the table,
Remains there...
Ashes fall on the table,
Brushed away by a wrinkled hand.
A small, young hand draws a card,
Slaps three nines down, and says
I'm out!
The child is gone.
Off to dream of Kings and Queens and Wild Cards.
The grandmother sits at the table, still,
Thinking, brushes a dead fly away
With a hand more feeble than before.
Still thinking,
Waiting,
For the first rays of sun to peek
Through the faded drapery.

Crystal Sipes, honorable mention

A Retreat into Silence



"No one knows his name. I doubt that your Uncle Jim even knows. She never talked about him," my mother disclosed.

I had just learned that my grandfather had adopted my Uncle Jim when he was eight years old. I wanted to know more about his natural father.

"Your grandma was married once before to another man. He was in the service overseas during World War II and never came back," my mother continued.

"Did he die in Europe? Was he given a medal for bravery? Was Grandma's heart broken?" my questions raced. There was so little I really knew about this woman whom I called Grandma.

Before and during World War II most people called her Florence McFarland. Perhaps her secretary friends from the office christened her "Flossie." They probably took frequent trips to downtown Philly. Their favorite part of the outings must have been watching the trim young men in uniform saunter down the street.

"Look at *that* doll," the blond girl with the impeccable hat would observe of every male passerby under 30. Over coffee and cigarettes they discussed music—the Dorsey brothers, Johnny Mercer, Billie Holiday. And movies—the latest Bogey-Bacall picture and anything starring Cary Grant.

Florence enjoyed these times but she was often preoccupied with financial matters.

It may have been a rainy evening in April when she decided to pick up dinner at the deli. Her girlfriends from the office had dates with sailors that evening so Flossie was on her own. She paid for

her ham and cheese sandwich on rye with the emergency coins in her change purse. Struggling with her umbrella, she did not notice the tall khaki-clad man opening the door for her. When she looked up to thank the chivalric stranger, her worries about the rent vanished.

Florence and the stranger laughed at her jumbled umbrella and stepped back inside the deli. "Looks like a job for the U.S. Army," the man confidently announced as he took the umbrella from her. Deftly, he tweaked the handle back into place.

"Thank you, sir. I probably would have gotten soaked without your assistance. I've never seen such a display of skill and intelligence," Florence playfully responded.

"Some people never recover from these types of experiences. In this case, maybe you should be debriefed over coffee," the man declared as he removed his hat. He was cold and besides, there was something intriguing about her deep brown eyes.

"No, he did not die. He did not even disappear. Well, I guess he disappeared by choice," my mom further revealed.

Florence and the handsome stranger talked until the deli owner started to clear his throat and glance at the clock. The man had been right about this woman's eyes; their beauty hid years of pain. He liked the fact that he could make her eyes dance with laughter.

My account always stops there. Their meeting didn't happen like that at all. Maybe I have seen too many romanticized versions of World War II love stories. The plot is basically the same: lonely single girl meets Prince GI Joe and lives happily ever after. My version is a cliché because clichés are not painful. I do not want this man to be a cruel man so I make him handsome, flirtatious, and compassionate.

It hurts too much to imagine my grandma staring blankly at the family doctor. Three months had passed since her new husband went to fight in Europe. "You don't have stomach problems

at all, Florence. You're going to have a baby. Congratulations." The word must have sounded hollow and meaningless.

It hurts too much to imagine my grandma staring blankly at a letter postmarked Paris, France:

Dearest Florence,

I received your letter and am sorry to have to inform you that I have filed annulment papers. I am too young to be a father. Besides, we're practically strangers and I have met a wonderful girl here. I have enclosed the papers for you to sign and my last check from the Army. Au revoir.

It hurts too much to imagine my grandma holding her newborn son James, knowing that there is no one nervously waiting in the next room for the good news.

It hurts too much to imagine my grandma consoling six-year-old James and telling him to ignore the cruel children at the playground. They are claiming that his mother was never married to his father.

"No one knows his name. I doubt that your Uncle Jim even knows. She never talked about him." It must have hurt too much.

Carla Meinke

Retirement

The seventy-two year old skin that frames your ashen eyes is grey and wrinkled
you must be old
you must be old
so they tell you

for your own good, "quit mowing the grass, raking the leaves, shoveling the walk let the grass grow wild and turn
brown, let the wind carry the dry leaves away, let the snow melt from the sun"
of course you shrug off the finality of it all
and you still keep living
and you're still old

every morning you rise before the sun
and wake that old dog
grab your gear and hike three or four odd miles up
the beaten path into the darkness of the sleeping trees
to the same stream that runs past your house
that starts where the water meets the sky
and you stop now
rest now
and retire
bending down to take in water with shaking hands
watching your reflection turn 73, 74, 75 . . .

as the pieces of light begin to peek through the falling leaves, the leaves share the light's sky with the water, descending
to the soft surface floating from the tree shaking in the whispering wind
you find peace as you reflect
how carefully the gentle breath of life escorts away the dead

your kids are asleep, as are their kids
so let them sleep
let them dream
you will sleep when you must

for now you are still rising for your morning hike
day after day and yes you're old old old
thank God you're still old

Bryan Scichilone

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